

UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX

STUDENTS*
UNION



UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX STUDENTS* UNION

SU ADVICE CONFLICT OF INTEREST POLICY

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Appendix A: SU Homes and SU Advice Conflict of Interest Policy

1. Statement of Intent

SU Advice is committed to working in the best interests of each of our clients on an equal and impartial basis. Every effort is made to provide full access to the service to all students. However, we recognise that there are circumstances where we cannot act in the best interests of an existing or prospective client and a 'Conflict of Interest' exists. In these instances we will take steps to ensure that:

- The advice we give is independent and impartial, and seen to be independent and impartial
- We protect the confidentiality of our clients in line with our confidentiality policy and terms of service
- Wherever possible, we seek an outcome where all parties concerned have access to independent and impartial advice

2. Understanding Conflicts of Interest

A 'Conflict of Interest' is a situation that arises where it is deemed our ability to issue impartial advice is in question. This may be because the interests of one client are (or are perceived to be) in conflict with those of another client, the interests of the organisation as a whole, or the interests of one or more members of staff or volunteers (particularly in the case of those giving advice).

Advisers must be aware of the potential for conflicts of interest to occur within SU Advice and their obligation to our clients in these cases.

3. Types of Conflict

Conflicts are likely to be of three main types:

- a) The Adviser has an invested personal interest in the case or client. This may include a prior awareness of a situation the client is describing, or knowing the client in a personal capacity.
- b) Two (or more) different parties involved in the same case approaching SU Advice for support.
- c) The case is against the University of Essex Students' Union or a member of staff employed by the Students' Union.

4. Identifying Conflicts of Interest

When meeting, or engaging, with a client for the first time, Advisers must be alert to the possibility of conflicts of interest. It is recognised, that it is not always possible to identify conflict of interest before advising clients as most clients will initially be seen by different advisers and that due to the nature of the service not all advisers will recognise that a conflict of interest is arising. It is the

responsibility of the SU Advice Manager or Deputy Manager to identify, and take action on, conflicts of interest as part of case management duties.

Staff and volunteers of SU Advice are asked to identify and update (where necessary) any potentials for conflict (for example, other roles or outside interests). These interests will be considered when assigning advisers to specific cases.

5. Action to be Taken

In the case of 3(a), the Adviser should, upon identifying the conflict, immediately inform the SU Advice Manager/Deputy Manager and seek an alternative Adviser to take the case. If this occurs during an interview the Adviser should explain they are unable to continue the appointment, but an alternative Adviser will be made available to them. If the client is known to all advisers, the SU Advice Manager will take the decision as to whether the conflict is too great for the service to provide impartial advice.

In the case of 3(b), in some instances it may be deemed possible for both parties to continue to be advised by individual SU Advice Advisers. This decision should be made by the SU Advice Manager, or Deputy Manager and they will be responsible for ensuring the impartiality of both cases.

If a potential, or actual, conflict of interest is identified and it is not felt that both parties can continue to receive impartial advice, the client who approached SU Advice first will continue to be advised (unless circumstances dictate otherwise). The other person/s will be contacted by the SU Advice Manager or Deputy Manager. They will be advised that SU Advice is unable to assist them further and will be referred to another appropriate service. On most occasions a referral will be made internally to another University support service although there may be times when an external agency is more appropriate. Whenever possible this notification will occur without a breach in the confidentiality of the first client although SU Advice recognises that it may be necessary to inform the person to be referred that this has happened because of a conflict of interest. However, in such circumstances no further information will be made available.

If a referral is to be made SU Advice will seek the permission of the client to pass their details on to the relevant service or external agency. Once permission has been granted a copy will be taken of the existing case notes and a call will be made to the relevant service provider to advise them of the situation and ask them to contact the client with an appointment. The case notes will then be forwarded to the relevant office in advance of the first appointment with the

client. A record of the referral will be kept on the client's case notes and SU Advice will have no further involvement with the client with regard to that situation.

If a referral is to be made to an external organisation the client will be asked whether they are happy to contact the other organisation themselves or whether they would like SU Advice staff to do so on their behalf. If the clients would like help the member of staff should follow the same procedure as above.

In the case of 3c) above, if there is deemed to be a conflict against the Students' Union as a whole, or a member of staff of the organisation, referrals will be made (as above) to a relevant University or External service.

In all cases clients should always be reminded that they will be welcome to return to SU Advice in the future with any other issues.

6. SU Homes and SU Advice Conflict of Interest Policy

A separate policy (Appendix A) regarding potential conflicts of interest between SU Homes and SU Advice is in existence. Any student wishing to receive advice about a SU Homes property will have the conflict of interest policy explained to them. If they do not wish to continue to be advised a referral will be made to an alternative external support service, such as Shelter or the Citizens Advice Bureau.

APPENDIX A:

SU Advice and SU Homes Conflict of Interests Policy and Confidentiality Agreement

SU Advice has existed for over 25 years and prides itself on being confidential, independent and impartial. We have expertise and experience in many areas, particularly housing and have provided advice and support to many students who have had housing issues over the years.

The staff within SU Advice have received specific training on issues of student housing.

The University of Essex Students' Union also offers a student letting service, SU Homes. The purpose of SU Homes is to provide a free, student focussed, service which encompasses the provision and management of student housing within the private rental sector.

SU Homes is a separate limited company.

SU Advice is a service provided by the registered charity which is the Students' Union.

The University of Essex Students' Union supports and enhances the educational, social, cultural and recreational activities of all students at Essex. The role of the Students' Union is to provide representation for all students both locally and nationally.

Using SU Advice

As a client of SU Advice we wish to assure you that we remain confidential, independent and impartial from SU Homes.

As our client you are covered by our confidentiality policy which means that we do not disclose any information about you or your case without your prior consent. If we feel it appropriate and useful to discuss your case with SU Homes staff, we will only do so with your express written permission. It is important to note that we are unable to provide any additional weight to your case.

If we believe that your case highlights any areas for improvement for policy or procedure, we will, with your permission, contact the VP Welfare who will raise these concerns on your behalf. Alternatively, we may suggest that you contact the VP Welfare directly.



If you feel that you do not wish to use our service we can provide details of alternative external agencies which you can contact for advice.

This policy will be renewed annually.

Please confirm by signing below that you are happy for us to deal with your case following the above declaration

PRINT NAME _____

SIGNATURE _____